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ABSTRACT

Presented here are suggestions by the Community Service Society of New York to the 1981 New York State Legislature regarding state government's obligations to the poor and disadvantaged. The three recommendations that receive priority in the report are calls for increasing the public assistance grant, financing the Child Welfare Reform Act, and providing adequate funding for community based public services. Other areas of legislative concern include education, criminal justice, housing, and health and nutrition. Under education, the report proposes a more equitable state aid formula, and an increase in the State's share of the costs of educating disabled children. Criminal justice recommendations focus on the repeal of the juvenile offender law, an increase in community services for juveniles, sentencing reform, and an increase in funds for prison alternatives. An increase in funds for preventive and primary ambulatory care, home care, and maternal and child care is urged in the area of health services. Finally, for housing improvement, the report proposes real estate tax assessment reform, passage of the Emergency Tenant Protection Act, and the use of state bonding authority to establish a housing rehabilitation program. (APM)

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AN AGENDA FOR NEW YORK'S FORGOTTEN MILLIONS

An Appeal to the 204th Legislature

COMMUNITY SERVICE SOCIETY OF NEW YORK
105 EAST 22 STREET, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10010

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January, 1981

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INTRODUCTION

In 1981, New York State faces a year of great uncertainty, involving both the state of the economy and the nature of actions which may be taken by the new national administration. However, this climate of uncertainty should not be allowed to obscure two critical facts relating to this Legislature's mission. First, the State will have a sizable budget surplus to work with in the next fiscal year. In the past three years, New York State has reduced taxes for businesses and individuals by $2 billion. Despite this substantial revenue drain, most experts agree that the State will begin the next fiscal year with a revenue surplus of between $200-$250 million.*

Second, the simple reality is that New York State has failed in recent years to meet its essential obligations to the poor and disadvantaged who have seen their already marginal standard of living ravaged by inflation. In other areas, such as mental health services or the criminal justice system, there has been a totally inadequate response at both State and local level; new services and facilities must be provided.

In particular, Community Service Society urges that the Legislature and the Governor allocate adequate revenues to those programs affecting the poor -- and in our state today this increasingly means Blacks, Hispanics and the elderly -- whose needs have been shunted aside in recent sessions.

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* New York Times, Thursday, Dec. 4, 1980, B4
Counter budget checklist, Nova Institute, New York.

Nowhere is this more urgent than in the area of a public assistance grant increase.

The grant level, which is established exclusively by each state, has been frozen in New York since 1974. (The separate shelter grant paid to welfare families was also frozen soon after.) In the intervening years, the cost of living has risen rapidly with the cost of essentials like food, energy and rent actually exceeding the overall Consumer Price Index. Today, each member of a welfare family is expected to subsist on $2.08 a day for every human need except shelter and health costs.

We are not asking that these families be compensated for the entire loss in purchasing power they have suffered in the past six years, desirable as that might be. That would require a major restructuring of the entire welfare program which can only come from the Fedral government, and for which we will continue to strive. Instead we are asking the State to arrest the constant slide in the quality of life of these families by instituting a 15% increase in the basic grant and by considering a longterm standard which would once and for all ensure a humane yardstick for aiding those who have no other recourse.

We were therefore extremely gratified to hear the Governor give the highest priority to a grant increase in his State of the State message. Taken in conjunction with Senate Majority Leader Anderson's endorsement of a 15% grant increase this year, and the consistent support this issue has received from the Assembly majority, we sense the emergence of an outstanding bi-partisan agreement which will provide a long-deferred improvement

in the oppressive lives of public assistance recipients throughout our state.

In addition, we have set two other absolute priorities which we feel the State has neglected for too long. One is necessary funding for the Child Welfare Reform Act, legislation which took many years to achieve and which offers real hope to families and children in trouble. Secondly, we urge full funding for community-based social services which also serve the most deprived segments of our population and have been declining in recent years.

Since, in each case, we have outlined how much such improvement will cost, action on these priorities can be measured against available resources.

We next list a series of legislative goals in several other critical areas: education, criminal justice, health and nutrition, and housing. We believe that this Legislature should undertake major action in each of these areas to restore equity in helping local communities to meet their financial burdens and provide quality services to all the residents of our state. In this regard, nothing could be more urgent than the Governor's recommendation that the State assume the share of Medicaid costs currently borne by localities. This step, if implemented within a meaningful time frame and not crippled by parallel cuts in other State aid to communities, could provide a true renaissance for our hard-pressed local governments. As another major step in this direction, we urge the adoption of a long-postponed real estate tax assessment policy that will strengthen local tax bases while minimizing disruption in property values or land use.

For over 130 years Community Service Society has been dedicated to increasing the life options of the poor and disadvantaged and to providing a decent, humane standard of living for all. We take great pride in our long association with reforms which achieved some of these goals, but we are also painfully aware that many of these programs have faced almost constant assault from the day they were instituted. In times of crisis, the poor and their needs are easy targets. Today the poor have unquestionably become the worst victims of a continuing economic malaise which combines runaway inflation with declining employment opportunities.

In the early 1960's, America "rediscovered" the poor and we undertook a broad national commitment to significantly reduce poverty and bring the disadvantaged into the mainstream of American life and opportunity. Now, less than two decades later, there is a severe danger that the poor are again being made "invisible." We must not allow this to happen in New York State.

PRIORITY 1: INCREASE THE PUBLIC ASSISTANCE GRANT

The current public assistance grant levels were established in 1974, and have not been raised since then. The basic grant is based on the size of a family and is supposedly designed to cover all necessary costs of living except shelter (for which a separate allowance is paid) and medical costs (which are covered by Medicaid). Supplementary food benefits are provided by the Federal Food Stamp Program.

Currently 1.27 million New York State residents, almost two-thirds of

whom are children, are surviving on Aid to Families with Dependent Children or Home Relief. Under the impact of record inflation rates, public assistance families have seen a budget, which many experts feel was inadequate when the State's Standard of Need was first established in 1969, erode to a point where an adequate, healthful standard of living cannot be maintained.

In addition, soon after the last grant increase six years ago, maximum allowable public assistance rent levels were frozen. Yet in the intervening period rent increases and fuel cost "pass-alongs" accelerated rapidly so that today a minimum of one-third of public assistance families have exceeded the ceiling and must use money set aside for other purposes, primarily food, to pay the higher rents.

If the existing Standard of Need had been indexed to the cost of living since it was instituted, there would be a monthly "survival gap" of $113. in the basic grant for a four-person family, even when the current value of food stamps is included in available income.

While there has been a growing recognition among legislators that simple equity demands an increase in the basic grant, there are still those who argue that since food stamp benefits (which are 100% Federally funded) would decline as grants rose, both the recipients and the State would be losers. Certainly there would be some loss. Recipents would not gain the full amount of any increase, but they would experience a net

gain which would lead to an improved standard of living.

Similarly, the State Department of Social Services emphasizes that while the State would lose the benefit of food stamp dollars, the additional Federal payments for AFDC and increased Medicaid eligibility attendant on a grant increase would still provide greater amounts of Federal assistance. (For example, a 15% basic grant increase would result in the loss of $58.1 million in food stamp dollars, but would draw in $88 million more in Federal AFDC and Medicaid payments, for a net gain to the State's economy of $29.9 million.)

Community Service Society believes that all persons have the right to an assured adequate standard of living. We urge the Legislature to adopt an immediate increase in the basic grant which will begin to close the significant gap in living standards caused by six years of inaction.

CSS PROPOSES:

- An immediate increase of 15% in the basic grant, for an estimated cost in next year's budget of $62.3 million.
- Adoption of a timetable which will provide all recipients with a basic grant income equal to a modified Bureau of Labor Statistics Lower Living Standard Budget.

PRIORITY 2: FINANCE THE CHILD WELFARE REFORM ACT

The Child Welfare Reform Act of 1979 was landmark legislation, mandating long overdue revisions in the manner in which children are treated in the foster care system. Today over 35,000 children are enmeshed in this system. Most of these children come from poor, single-parent families, who

are either Black or Hispanic. Many have been abused, physically or mentally. Many have special needs.

The present mechanism for service delivery is badly designed and often works to the detriment of the needs of the children and their families. A number of studies have shown that too many children enter foster care unnecessarily; too few efforts are aimed at returning children home; too little is done to find permanent, adoptive homes for those children who should not or cannot return to their families. There is an imperative need to diminish large-scale institutional care for these children.*

Community Service Society has long criticized the serious deficiencies in the foster care system in our State, and the failures of public and private agencies alike in meeting the needs of the growing numbers of children placed in their care. We worked hard to gain the adoption of this legislation. But a law is meaningless without the funds necessary to enforce it and institute the reforms it provides.

CSS PROPOSES:

— That the 1981-82 State budget contain an appropriation of at least $21 million (the amount requested in the Governor's budget in 80-81) to carry out the preventive services purposes of the Act, with a specific emphasis on accelerating the objective of providing programs to keep children from entering foster care

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*This synopsis of the crisis in foster care is drawn from an outstanding study released last fall by the Mayor's Task Force on Foster Care Services entitled "Redirecting Foster Care." The Task Force was co-chaired by James R. Dumpson and Stanley Brezenoff.

from the outset and to increase the placement of children already within the system in permanent adoptive homes.

--- That an additional $250,000 be provided to enable the five field offices of the New York City Office of Special Service for Children to provide greater support from the imprest fund for early intervention in the problems of poor, minority families experiencing potentially damaging stress.

PRIORITY 3: PROVIDE ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY-BASED PUBLIC SERVICES

Community Service Society is alarmed at the decrease in the availability of badly-needed direct service programs for our most disadvantaged citizens at a time of deepening economic and social crisis. Three groups have been especially harmed by these service deficiencies: the mentally ill, the elderly, and parents needing day care for young children.

In the past several years, the State has radically altered the services it provides to the mentally ill. First, thousands of long-term patients in State mental hospitals were "deinstitutionalized" without the provision of adequate aftercare facilities in the communities in which the patients were maintained. Now the State has instituted a second policy which limits new admissions to State facilities only to patients whose symptoms are obviously severe. This has led to severe overcrowding in voluntary and municipal hospitals and the "squeezing out" of thousands of other patients who may be

suffering from senility or other chronic disorders, turning them onto the streets — homeless and disoriented.[1]

While New York's overall population has been declining, the number of the needy has actually been increasing, especially in central cities such as New York. Part of this increase occurs among senior citizens who are living longer but have seen their modest savings ravaged by inflation, their health costs (especially drug costs) rise precipitately, and their housing options decline.

More and more of these elderly have come to rely on the services provided by local senior centers, especially in the provision of nutrition. Yet many of these centers now face complete shutdown or curtailment of services.

As is so often the case, the very old share the experience of deprivation with the very young. The same economic and social forces which are impoverishing the elderly are placing severe new stresses on families with children, especially among Blacks and Hispanics. For instance, many women who are single parents work to support their children, whether adequate day care facilities are available or not. At a time when such facilities are most in demand, to meet the special needs of parents and

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[1] "New York City Psychiatric Wards Overflow As Albany Changes Its Mental Health Role" by Robin Herman, The New York Times, Monday, December 8, 1980, L B1.

Private Lives-Public Spaces: Mentally Disabled Adults on the Streets of New York City. Community Service Society, Institute for Social Welfare Research, 1980.

children alike, many face closure because of lack of funds. These threatened closings come on the heels of severe day care cutbacks in the late 1970's.

Under Title XX the Federal government provides funds specifically for such services as day care facilities and senior centers. Since 1979, the State has been passing through fewer Title XX dollars to communities for the provision of direct services.

Nationally, Title XX funds are allocated to individual states on the basis of population rather than actual need. A decline in New York State's overall population in recent years has led to a proportional decrease in the State's share of Federal funds. The retention of the Title XX funds at the State level has meant that localities have suffered a disproportionate share of the cutback. Unless the funds are passed through in the next budget, it is estimated that 40 to 60 day care and senior citizen centers will be forced to close their doors, and many others will be forced to curtail current services.

Community Service Society will seek to ensure that fundamental services needed by our poorest and most vulnerable residents be maintained and expanded where necessary. We are particularly committed to seeing that every dollar earmarked for service is spent efficiently to provide such services.

CSS PROPOSES:

— That all Federal Title XX funds be passed through to the localities instead of being absorbed at the State level and that any allocations required to replace these funds not be drawn from other direct service programs. This will require an additional $28 million in next year's budget.

--- That the State recognize its obligation to the mentally ill and provide adequate, humane, and appropriate treatment in community facilities and that staff and funding be re-allocated from State mental hospitals to decentralized programs through the Local Assistance Budget. Last year New York State spent $786 million on mental hospitals, but only 10% of that amount on community-based services.

ADDITIONAL LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

EDUCATION

A MORE EQUITABLE STATE AID FORMULA FOR EDUCATION

The decision of the State Supreme Court in Levittown v. Nyquist held that the State's system of financing public schools was unconstitutional. Furthermore, the additional financial burdens of the larger cities are not taken into account in apportioning school aid. Therefore, New York City and other large city school districts continue to be shortchanged in the amount of State aid they receive compared to other school districts. There is no allowance for their particular financial burdens including: the greater amount of other municipal services required and their greater cost; the greater costs to cities because of the high rates of school absenteeism; the high concentration in cities of students with special learning needs, which require the provision of more costly educational programs; and the higher education costs because the cost of living is higher than in other areas of the State. Even though New York City educates about one-third of all the public school children in New York State, it receives only 27 percent of the

State's 3.8 billion dollar education expenditures (for 1980-81). In 1980-81 New York State will contribute its share of education expenses up to a ceiling level of $1,700 per pupil. However, the cost of education is often much higher for pupils with special educational needs.

In order to assure that the children in the public schools of large urban areas, the vast majority of whom are both poor and minority, receive the educational services they need, sufficient funds must be provided. Community Service Society has long been in the forefront of those demanding greater accountability and improvements in the quality of teaching in the school system.

A more equitable distribution of State aid, which addresses the issue of educational overburden in New York City, and other larger cities, would ensure a fair share of State education funds for New York City. The Governor's Task Force on Equity and Excellence in Education is examining alternate methods of allocating State aid to education and will be making its proposals to the Legislature, after the Court of Appeals has made its decision on the Levittown case. In the meantime, however, steps can be taken.

CSS PROPOSES:

— Incremental changes in the State aid formula which will increase the amount of money generated for local communities while addressing the issues of fairness and equity enunciated in the Levittown decision. For instance, New York City educates about one-third of all the public school children in New York State and receives only 27 percent of the State's $3.8 billion education expenditures (for 1980-1981).

STATE FUNDING FOR THE ADDITIONAL COSTS OF EDUCATION SERVICES FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

The provisions of Federal Law 94-142, which calls for a free public appropriate education for all handicapped children, have yet to be fully implemented. New York City has been found by the Court to be out of compliance with Federal law, and is attempting to redress this. Large numbers of handicapped children are concentrated in New York City. As increasing numbers are identified and placed in the New York City public school system, costs increase. The Federal government has not yet fulfilled its commitment for its share of the funding. However, the State must carry out its constitutional obligation to provide for the education of these children, and relieve the cities of this unfair financial burden.

State legislation enacted last year changed the specific provisions affecting the financing of the education of handicapped children. In a move toward equity, five different State funding formulas for the education of handicapped children were reduced to two, one for children in the public schools, and the other for children in private schools. The State pays up to 85 percent of the excess costs of educating children with handicapping conditions in private schools, but only up to 49 percent for children in public schools.

CSS PROPOSES:

— As a first step toward equity, that the State increase its share of the excess costs of educating children with handicapping conditions in public schools. On the basis of available information, the Regents estimates that under present law excess cost aid would increase by about $39.6 million next year, mostly because of the larger number of students being served. If the State share in

the excess cost formula were increased from 49 to 54 percent, this would result in a total increase in public school excess cost aid of $48 million. If one assumed that New York City would receive about one-half of this (because it has more than one-half of all the handicapped children in the State), this could mean an additional $24 million for New York City. Ultimately, the State should enact a formula which would cost localities the same, no matter who provides the service, where it is provided, and how much different programs cost.

— Enactment of an excess cost funding formula that encourages the placement of children in educational programs most suited to their needs. The special needs of these children and the special burdens placed on their families already struggling for survival, have been amply documented by the CSS Direction Service which serves as a resource for this group on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

REPEAL JUVENILE OFFENDER LAW

Since September, 1978, those children aged thirteen, fourteen and fifteen charged with murder, and those aged fourteen and fifteen charged with specified serious felonies have been subject to prosecution in the adult criminal court. During the criminal court process, and under certain conditions, cases can be removed for processing in the Family Court. New York is the only state with such a law. Passed in haste with little debate and no public hearing, this law, though since amended to eliminate some unconstitutional and problematic passages, has proven to be an unwise and costly method of dealing with violent youth crime. Two-thirds of all juvenile offender sentences handed down in New York City so far have involved probation, youthful offender treatment, or confinement of up to three years — nothing more severe than could have been meted out under the Designated Felony Act Section of the Family Court Act.

CSS is committed to diverting from the criminal and juvenile justice system all individuals who do not require embroilment in that system in order to insure due process or to protect the public safety. Removing children from the adult criminal justice arena is a significant step toward reducing the negative impact such processing entails. We believe, further, that existing Family Court provisions are adequate for dealing with the vast majority of serious youthful offenders. For those most violent and troublesome cases, we favor waiver, with adequate due process protection, into the adult system.

CSS PROPOSES:

— Repeal of the Juvenile Offender Law and its replacement with enactment of a waiver provision for the Family Court Act.

INCREASE COMMUNITY SERVICES FOR JUVENILES

Community-based services are needed for:

1. Youth from families, especially impoverished families in stressful situations, who need outside assistance in meeting basic needs;
2. Pre-delinquent youth in danger of becoming increasingly involved in anti-social behavior;
3. Youth who, because of drug or alcohol abuse, are unable to function in society;
4. Youth, caught up in the justice system who, with assistance, can lead productive, non-criminal lives.

We believe that adequately-funded community-based services for youth are imperative. Such services as drug and alcohol treatment programs, mediation

centers, pre-employment and job placement centers, intensive probation and community service sentencing projects, assist a broad spectrum of youth. These services are geared to addressing the causes of youthful dysfunction rather than the symptoms. As such they are cost effective in both fiscal and human terms. These services are especially significant for the urban poor. This year it will be most important to guard against funding cut-backs and to work for legislative endorsement, where necessary, for these and like programs, thus committing State support for permanent community alternatives.

CSS PROPOSES:

— Continued and increased State aid for community services for youth, with an addition of $4 million to the Division for Youth budget for local services programs and community-based services.

— An additional State commitment of $6 million for drug and alcohol treatment programs.

INSTITUTE SENTENCING REFORM

New York State relies heavily on incarceration as a criminal penalty. Many crimes, as a result of recent legislation, now carry mandatory minimum prison sentences. New York State prisons are overcrowded, as are New York City detention facilities. Pretrial detainees are often held for lack of bail money, an unfair burden on the poor. Pretrial detention has been shown to influence the choice of incarceration as a penalty following conviction, further perpetuating differential treatment based on social class.

CSS believes that sentencing reform is long overdue. We believe that most prison sentences should be shortened in length; that emphasis should

be placed on the swiftness and certainty of sentence; that restitution, community service, and fines should be the punishment of choice for many less serious crime categories; that community mediation should be used as a court diversion mechanism; that alternatives to bail need to be written into legislation; and that statewide pre-trial services should be institutionalized. The effort to enact a determinate sentencing system and abolish parole must be lobbied against since, in the present climate, it would most certainly entail longer sentences and increased use of incarceration.

CSS PROPOSES:

- Establishment of mediation centers on a statewide basis. The Senate Task Force on Criminal Justice estimates that a state expenditure of $3 million would produce savings of $5.6 million in court costs.
- Calculation of good time off the minimum sentence, as well as the maximum, coupled with a provision for earned good time. Each day a state prisoner serves his or her sentence on parole represents an incarceration rate savings of $41 a day.
- Enabling legislation making community service a sentencing option for non-violent felonies.

INCREASE FUNDS FOR PRISON ALTERNATIVES

New York State prisons are currently at capacity. The New York State Department of Correctional Services has recently issued a five-year master plan which calls for more cell space yet makes an eloquent plea for adequate funding for prison alternatives. Commissioner Thomas Coughlin has noted emphatically that there are prisoners in his system who are inappropriately confined. CSS believes that prison is unnecessary for

most non-violent offenders. Indeed, we believe that prison is often so destructive, so dehumanizing, that it is in society's best interest, as well as that of the offender, to have more sentences served in the community. This year, with fiscal considerations and constraints the order of the day, support should be coalesced for the effort to end unnecessary confinement.

CSS PROPOSES:

--- Expanded use of community-based alternative criminal sanctions. The Senate Democratic Task Force on Criminal Justice estimates a total savings of $232.5 million ($40 million - State, $64 million - counties, and $128.5 million - New York City) if selected non-violent criminal offenders were placed on intensive probation requiring community service and restitution rather than incarceration.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

PREVENTIVE AND PRIMARY AMBULATORY CARE

Primary ambulatory care, emphasizing disease prevention, early detection and treatment of illness, and health maintenance, is considered a cost-effective way to improve the health status of a population. Over the long run, preventive health care is expected to result in reduced hospitalization.

One problem in expanding preventive and primary ambulatory care is that health insurance does not typically cover the costs of such care. In fact, the emphasis on payment for acute inpatient hospital care is in large part responsible for high health care costs. Those costs, in turn, have invited a new look at health promotion and screening to identify health problems early, thus helping prevent hospitalization and costly hospital and medical bills.

Low-income persons experience both reimbursement and access problems in obtaining ambulatory care. Many low-income persons live in neighborhood

that lack sufficient office-based physicians and, therefore, depend on hospital outpatient departments and free-standing clinics for primary health care. Many New York hospitals, especially those located in the low-income areas of the city, are experiencing mounting operating deficits. Some even risk bankruptcy. One of the major factors contributing to their financial problems is unreimbursed provision of free care to the medically indigent population. Lost revenues result in reduced services and, ultimately, in hospital closings, most often in areas where other health resources are lacking. Solutions must be found to finance health care for the medically indigent and to address the reimbursement problems.

CSS PROPOSES:

--- that state funds be increased for preventive and primary health care services to expand existing services and to support development of needed new services.

Currently, more than $13 million are budgeted for primary ambulatory care. These funds should be increased in the 1981-82 budget by $4 million for expansion.

--- that equity be secured in the reimbursement for ambulatory care services by including a community service factor in the formula, as is now done by Blue Cross/Blue Shield for voluntary hospitals.

No appropriation from the State is required.

--- that private insurance companies expand their coverage of health

prevention and outpatient services.

No appropriation from the State is required.

— that the reimbursement system address the problem of providing health care for the medically indigent.

The cost depends on the methods selected to address the problem. One way is to raise Medicaid income eligibility levels; this would increase the Medicaid population and increase Medicaid expenditures by an amount dependent upon the levels chosen. Currently the City and the hospitals absorb the cost of free care; adding some people to Medicaid would mean partial absorption of those costs by the federal and State governments.

Other recommendations to address this problem have been made by the New York State Council on Health Care Financing in its recently completed report on hospital financing.

HOME HEALTH CARE

Home care is intended to help individuals who are convalescent, chronically ill, or functionally impaired to maintain or improve their health status as well as to shorten, postpone, or avoid institutionalization. The kind and amount of home care services available to people depend on the kind of third-party coverage they have. Most of the coverage limitation problems which have prevented many persons from getting needed services must be addressed at the federal level. The lack of growth in home care also comes from the inability of home care agencies to expand their hours of service, their staff and the mix of services they offer.

The Health Systems Agency projects that, by 1982, a minimum of 108,000 persons in New York City will require home care services; in 1978, 86,000 persons received care. Thus home care providers must expand to care for about 22,000 additional persons by 1982. The availability of home care services during evening and weekend hours, a particularly important service for persons

who live alone and have no support from family or friends, should be increased. Although the resources for expansion will come primarily from third-party payors, grants from the state are needed to fill gaps in services and for the development of support services.

CSS PROPOSES:

— that appropriations be increased for the home health care agency expansion and start-up grants legislation which was enacted last year.

The state budget for 1980-81 included $200,000 for this purpose. The appropriations should be $300,000 for 1981-82.

MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

Protecting the health of mothers and children is one of the most effective ways to ensure the future health of the population. A comprehensive range of services for this group must include prenatal delivery, and postpartum care for pregnant and newly-delivered women; family planning and abortion services for all women who want them; and preventive care, periodic check-ups, and corrective treatment for children.

Early prenatal care can substantially reduce not only maternal and infant illness and death, but the later expenditures for treatment of complicated deliveries, intensive care for premature infants, and the often lifetime medical and other care associated with birth defects and developmental problems. In New York City 20.9 percent of women delivering babies in 1978 received inadequate or no prenatal care. This ratio exceeded 30 percent in the poorer areas of Harlem and the Bronx. The single most important barrier to prenatal care is financial. Many women who cannot afford to pay

for prenatal care are not eligible for Medicaid, and have no private health insurance or have insurance with very limited coverage of prenatal and maternity care. Another significant reason for low utilization of prenatal care is the lack of understanding by the consumer of the importance of such services.

The decisions as to whether or not and when to bear children are personal ones, and are rights protected by the Constitution. Family planning and abortion services must be available to all women, regardless of age or income.

CSS PROPOSES:

— that project grants be available to develop additional maternal and child health services and to expand outreach and education services.

At least $500,000 should be appropriated for 1981-82 for such expansion.

— that private insurance coverage of prenatal care be expanded.

No state appropriations required.

— that efforts to eliminate or restrict free choice regarding abortion be opposed.

No separate appropriation required. Retaining use of Medicaid funding for abortion represents a cost to government, the amount dependent upon the restrictions imposed, if any.

— that efforts to abridge minors' rights to abortion through mandatory parental consent requirements be opposed.

No state appropriations required.

HOUSING

REAL ESTATE TAX ASSESSMENT REFORM

Despite the requirement in New York State law that all property be assessed at 100% of market value, communities assess at a wide range of rates and frequently at a variety of rates. New York City has developed a crazy-quilt of assessments, ranging from as low as 20% of market value on single family homes and vacant land in some boroughs to as high as 100% on some commercial properties and decaying multiple dwellings. Like properties are sometimes valued at different rates. Since a constant tax rate is applied to all properties, variation in the assessment rate results in different tax liabilities for properties with the same market value.

We hope that the reform process begun by the Temporary State Commission on the Real Property Tax will lead to a more equitable distribution of taxes, lessening the burden on older multiple dwellings and on their generally poorer residents. Assessment reforms, if gradually implemented, would strengthen the local tax base while minimizing any disruption in property values or land use.

CSS PROPOSES:

— that all properties must be assessed at 100% of market value. Without an accurate data base of all properties' value, the effect of various reforms cannot be predicted. By assessing both land and improvements of all classes of property at 100% of their market value, the importance of different types of

land use to the real estate base of the locality can be determined. This makes it easy to determine the fiscal implications of lightening or increasing the burden on some properties rather than on others; open, public decision making is then possible. To retain the same revenue, the tax rate would of course go down as the assessment went up.

— that, after the true value of all properties has been determined, the effect of any particular tax rate applied to the assessment be considered for each type of property. If a municipality then decides that the tax burden is too heavy on some types of property, it can implement a program of direct supports, rather than, as has been done in the past, simply setting unusually low values on these favored properties and then taxing them on this base.

— that all of the above reforms be instituted gradually. The time for implementation must not be open-ended, but the changes in taxes resulting from 100% assessment phased in according to schedule. For example, one or two years should be allowed for correcting assessments and the resulting changes in taxes should then be applied over a ten-year period. A true annual review of all assessments would allow the system to be easily maintained.

EMERGENCY TENANT PROTECTION ACT

With the demand for rental housing ever increasing and the supply of these units decreasing, the need for tenant protection, through the Emergency Tenant Protection Act has become more pressing. Because of an increasingly tight rental housing market, tenants, often with inadequate incomes to pay the present rent, would, without this protection, be faced with even higher rents. Moreover, the easing of restrictions would lead to increased rents for many without improved housing conditions. Therefore ...

CSS PROPOSES:

— that the Emergency Tenant Protection Act be extended, as an important means of insuring tenants against greatly increasing rents and, thus, guaranteeing affordable housing to low-to-middle-income residents.

USE OF STATE BONDING AUTHORITY FOR IN REM HOUSING

While most of the attention given the In Rem crisis has focused on New York City, housing abandonment is a State-wide problem. With little new construction taking place, the existing housing stock has become an increasingly valuable resource. In order to encourage preservation of existent housing ...

CSS PROPOSES:

— that New York State use its tax-exempt bonding authority to establish a State-wide, low-interest, long-term rehabilitation loan program.